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Analyzing the effects of ethical leadership and organizational politics on individual and team creativity, focusing on the mediating role of knowledge hiding

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A B S T R A C T

The purpose of the research is to analyze the effects of ethical leadership and organizational politics on individual and team creativity, focusing on the mediating role of knowledge hiding. The present study is a descriptive-correlational survey in terms of method and is applied in terms of purpose. The statistical population of this study included all employees of selected public organizations in the Eqlid County of Fars Province, totaling 950 individuals. From this population, 270 individuals were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling method based on the rule of thumb for structural equation modeling as the sample for the study. To collect statistical data, the following measures were used: the Ethical Leadership scale by Brown et al. (2005), the Organizational Politics scale by Kacmar and Carlson (1997), the Knowledge Hiding scale by Serenko and Bontis (2016), the Individual Creativity scale by Zhou and George (2001), and the Team Creativity scale by Hanke (2006). The validity of scales was confirmed using the content validity method, and the reliability was examined and confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding values of 0.89 for the Ethical Leadership, 0.82 for the Organizational Politics, 0.92 for the Knowledge Hiding, 0.87 for the Individual Creativity, and 0.85 for the Team Creativity. For data analysis, structural equation modelling (SEM) and the AMOS software were used. The results of the study confirmed and fitted the research model, indicating that ethical leadership and organizational politics have a significant negative impact on knowledge hiding. Additionally, knowledge hiding has a significant negative effect on both individual and team creativity of employees. By reducing knowledge hiding behaviors through ethical leadership and organizational politics, the level of creativity among employees at both individual and team levels increases.

Introduction

In the age of variability, uncertainty, complexity and amabiguity, the environment in which organizations develop has become increasingly complex (Liao et al., 2024). To improve their ability to adapt to environments, organizations must continue to be creative, innovative, and reformative for survival through the development of creative and innovative behaviors in their employees. Considering the importance of employee creativity in predicting positive results at work, several variables such as leadership empowerment (Zhang and Zhou, 2014), employees' tendency to learn (Gong et al., 2009), high performance work system (Tang et al., 2017)), intrinsic motivation (Dewett, 2007) and job dissatisfaction

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(Zhou and George, 2001) have been investigated. However, limited studies have examined the effects of workplace barriers such as knowledge hiding (KH) on employee creativity (Aryee et al., 2009), especially the moderating mechanisms that influence this relationship. Especially, its mediating role in the effect of research variables on individual and group creativity has not been studied. Because people are the main way of transferring knowledge in organizations, therefore, investigating KH among employees is of increasing importance.

Another effective factor in hiding knowledge at the leadership level is ethical leadership (EL). EL is defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Saeed et al., 2022; Rita Men, 2015). Leadership theories have shown that an ethical leader encourages employees to share knowledge with a valuable idea about their work task, and we expect that employees will be more enthusiastic and willing to engage in knowledge sharing behavior through an ethical superior and they have less desire to hide knowledge (Tang et al., 2015; Imani et al. 2022). Values and beliefs of managers and good and correct personality traits are the basis of organizational behavior, therefore the influence of leaders on employees in achieving organizational goals is the focus of attention (Alshammari et al., 2015).

Another effective variable in hiding knowledge at the leadership level is organizational politics (OP). Some views interpret OP as the use of power to influence the decision-making process or to ensure that the outcomes of a situation are favorable to a powerful person. Also, politics in the organization is defined as the process of building a coalition to gain control over a situation and ensure a positive outcome for the coalition (Kacmar and Carlson., 1997). OP are described as behaviors characterized by individuals' personal interests and are not punished by the organization. Examples of political behaviors include gaining credit for the success of others, working behind the scenes to obtain rewards, and so on (Taghizadeh and Rajabi Farjad, 2021). In a political organization, employees hide knowledge for three reasons. The first reason is to protect their personal interests in a political environment (Cui et al., 2016). The second reason is that since knowledge is considered as a source of power in the knowledge economy, knowledge workers hide knowledge to gain political advantage (Webster et al., 2008). A third reason is that employees may hide knowledge based on a defensive behavior. Employees may act defensively in a political environment (Ashforth and Lee, 1990). People who perceive politics in the workplace experience negative outcomes. For example, lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Taghizadeh and Rajabi Farjad, 2021) lead to lower job performance (Chang et al., 2009) and turnover intentions. Malik et al (2019) also stated that perceived OP predicts tacit knowledge and, in turn, negatively predicts employee creativity. According to what was said, hiding knowledge is directly and negatively related to individual and team creativity; Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a person with a high level of tacit knowledge will be less creative both individually and in a team. As a result, the purpose of this research is to analyze the effects of EL and OP on individual and team creativity, focusing on the mediating role of KH. Therefore, the main question and issue of the research is: What is the effect of EL and OP on KH and its role on creativity at both individual and team levels among public organization employees?

Theoretical Foundations annd Research Literature

Creativity (Individual and Team) and KH

Individual creativity is a mental process that is seen from a certain person and at a certain time; A process that results in a new work - either an idea or something new and different - is produced. New and different production can be verbal or non-verbal and objective or subjective (Fong et al., 2018). In studying about individual creativity, the following two important points should be noted: First, individual creativity can be the creation of new forms or forms from old ideas or products. In this case, often past thoughts and ideas are the basis of new creations. Second, individual creativity is an exclusive matter and is not the result of individual effort and only a general situation or issue; Hence, a person may create something of which he had no prior mental record; Although that thing has been created in a similar or completely identical way by someone else and in a specific situation (Anderson et al., 2014). Individual creativity requires the use of a certain type of intellectual flow; What one psychologist named Guilford (1967) called

"divergent thinking"; A way of thinking that is different from the general thought process of the society, in solving problems (Aghaei Fishani, 1998).

As discussed above and introduction section, one of the factors affecting employee creativity is knowledge sharing, and on the other hand, KH can have a reducing effect on the individual and group creativity of employees. Knowledge hiding- "an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person" (Škerlavaj et al., 2023)- is a serious matter in organizations, leading to conflict, deteriorated quality of relations, decreased creativity and task performance. Similar to many counter-productive phenomena, it is a low-frequency, high-impact behavior with empirically documented detrimental effects on important outcomes (see review studies Škerlavaj et al., 2023; Anand et al., 2021).

Existing studies on knowledge management indicate that KH impedes the circulation of knowledge within organizations (Caputo et al., 2021), damages relationships between colleagues and team performance, and negatively impacts on individual performance, innovation and creativity (Liao et al. 2024). This is because KH behavior enables these insiders to maintain their competitive advantage, and their personal performance canbe improved to some extent in the short term. However, if those who request knowledge discover this KH behavior, it can lead to mutual distrust and KH retaliation among team members. In the long run, interpersonal relationships between team members may be destroyed, resulting in a team climate of mutual distrust and hostile competition. At this point, individuals cannot obtain effective information from the team, hampering interactions and communication of innovative ideas and thoughts among team members, ultimately leading to a decline in employee creativity (Malik et al., 2019). An individual may become defensive in a politically charged work environment and engage in KH. While doing so, an individual may feel safer because coworkers will not be able to discover and exploit his or her weaknesses, as they could if all information were disclosed (Malik et al., 2019). In turn, defensive behaviors are known to decrease creativity. Individuals who adopt a defensive stance are more focused on safety; as creativity is risky and potentially has negative outcomes, they would avoid being creative. Supporting these arguments, Bogilović et al. (2017) in a recent study showed that KH is directly and negatively related to individual creativity. It is thus reasonable to assume that an individual who exhibits higher levels of KH will have lower creativity.

Ethical Leadership and KH

One of the important variables affecting the development of employee creativity and KH is the organization's leaders and the leadership style they use. As employees' direct superiors, leaders control most resources that employees need, so they play an important role in the process of enhancing employees' creativity (Liao et al. 2024).

One of the leadership styles that has been emphasized due to the current world conditions is EL. One of the most important duties of a leader is to have ethical views in management. Of course, not all managers can be expected to show a type of management behavior that agrees with ethical values; Because the type of management behavior is related to the personality of the leader. For a leader to be successful, he must be able to have a moral point of view and instill it in his subordinates.

In the researches of Resick et al. (2013) on the characteristics of ethical leaders, it indicates several distinct and dominant characteristics in these leaders: moral character and integrity, ethical awareness, cummunity/people orientation, motivating, encourage and empowering, and managing ethical accountability. Ethical leaders are people who are honest, trustworthy, and fair, and are known as decision makers who care about people and society, and as people who behave ethically in their personal lives (Sharma et al., 2019).

Ethical leaders are known as principled, sociable and honest people who make balanced and good decisions, often communicate about ethical principles with their followers, set clear ethical standards and use rewards and punishments to create a healthy and high productivity environment. create in the organization (Brown and Trevino, 2006; cited in Resick et al., 2013).

Organizational Politics and KH

Another factor affecting KH behaviors is employees' perception of OP. People accept organizational membership in order to fulfill their personal needs. In this sense, it is necessary to communicate with each other. In fact, social interactions between individuals provide favorable conditions for the emergence of political behavior. Such behavior creates a harmful and divisive working environment, in such a way that it reduces organizational efficiency and effectiveness. An environment that is full of political behavior may lead to KH decrease (Bashir et al., 2024), displacement, reduction of work quality, failure to achieve goals, decrease in employee performance and increase in stress and psychological pressure (Fani et al., 2014). Malik et al. (2019) defined OP as a subjective assessment of an individual regarding the self-serving behavior of his peers and managers at the workplace with other colleagues. A high level of OP fosters interpersonal conflict and mistrust among employees. The employees feel that their organizations are prejudiced and discriminating when they experience a highly politicized workplace environment (Bashir et al., 2024).

Bashir et al. (2024), citing O'connor and Morrison (2001) presented different situational and attitudinal determinants that deeply affect individuals' perceptions regarding OP. The hierarchical level, job autonomy, and formalization are essential situational factors that might influence whether an employee thinks his or her organization is political. Additionally, gender, locus of control, and Machiavellianism are significant examples of dispositional determinants. These factors interact with other organismic and psychological aspects to affect the individuals' perception of organizational politics (Bashir et al., 2024). It is tough to maintain a positive reciprocal relationship between an employer and employees after the development of the political perception of the organization in employees. On the contrary, people who have a low sense of control over their work do not understand the connection between their behavior and consequences and imagine that rewards and punishments are the result of unstable forces such as luck, probability or the whims of powerful people. The investigated job factors include independence, feedback, variety of skills and interaction with the manager.

Fani et al (2014), believe that job autonomy is negatively related to the perception of political activity. The lack of independence or diversity of skills indicates that others control the employee and leads to a feeling of powerlessness and increased perceptions of OP (Taghizadeh and Rajabi Farjad, 2021). Malik et al. (2019) discovered that workers might get dissatisfied and exhausted in deep-routed political environments; as a reaction, they may adopt silence and avoid sharing knowledge with their colleagues and the organization. On the other hand, creating a desirable organizational environment and culture through trust, active communication among employees, effective information systems, reward systems, and appropriate organizational structures and policies can facilitate knowledge sharing within the organization (Al-Alawi et al. 2007) and reduce employees' tendency to hide knowledge.

According to Bashir et al. (2024), employees in a highly politicized environment are mostly involved in self-serving activities and disregard the interests of others, which promotes interpersonal conflict and distrust among employees. Employees' social interactions weaken with their peers in a political environment, and they develop counterproductive work behaviors such as KH. Additionally, employees tend to hide their knowledge and expertise when they perceive that their organizations treat workers on a political basis rather than a performance basis.

Research Backgrounds

Liao et al. (2024) presented a cross-level model in a study titled "How does knowledge hiding play a role in the relationship between leader–member exchange differentiation and employee creativity? A cross-level model" using social information processing theory to examine how KH plays a role in the relationship between leader–member exchange differentiation and employee creativity.

Imani et al. (2022) in their study titled "Investigating the Effect of Perceived Ethical Leadership on Knowledge Hiding A Case Study on an Automobile Factory" examined the effect of perceived ethical leadership on staff knowledge hiding considering the mediating role of psychological safety and meaningful work and moderating role of harmonious work passion. Data were collected from 440 employees of an automotive company in Tehran. The results indicated that perceived ethical leadership

has a direct and negative effect on knowledge hiding. The positive roles of psychological safety and meaningful work as mediators and harmonious work passion as a moderator have been confirmed.

Saeed et al. (2022) in their study titled "linking ethical leadership to followers' knowledge sharing: mediating role of psychological ownership and moderating role of professional commitment" examined (1) the influence of EL on knowledge sharing, (2) the mediating role of psychological ownership, and (3) the moderating effect of professional commitment between EL and knowledge sharing. Data were collected from 307 public listed Pakistani companies' employees. The findings indicate a positive relationship between EL and knowledge sharing behavior.

Taghizadeh and Rajabi Farjad (2021) in their study examined the impact of perceived organizational policies on knowledge hiding with the moderating role of professional commitment among 460 employees of the National Iranian Oil Company. Using structural equation modeling, it was determined that employees' professional commitment moderates the relationship between perceived organizational policies and knowledge hiding in the National Iranian Oil Company.

Zandkarimi (2019) conducted a study on the relationship between EL and knowledge sharing with the mediating role of teachers' psychological empowerment. The results of the research showed that EL has a direct effect on knowledge sharing. EL directly affects psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment has a direct effect on knowledge sharing. Also, the effect of EL on knowledge sharing was indirectly explained by the mediator variable, psychological empowerment.

Malik et al. (2019) conducted a study titled investigating the relationship between perceived OP, KH, and employee creativity, with the aim of investigating the moderating role of professional commitment in the relationship between perceived OP and KH. The results showed that perceived OP positively predicts KH and, in turn, positively predicts employee creativity.

Dargahi et al. (2018) conducted a study on the relationship between knowledge management and creativity and organizational innovation in teaching hospital staff of Tehran University of Medical Sciences. The results showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between knowledge management and organizational creativity of organizational innovation, which indicated that organizational creativity is more influential than organizational innovation of the knowledge management variable.

Arshad and Ismail (2018) addressed the topic of "Incivility in the Workplace and Knowledge Hiding Behavior: Does Personality Matter?" in his thesis. The purpose of this article is to investigate the relationship between incivility in the workplace and KH and the role of personality tendencies (nervousness) in modulating such relationships. The observed data was collected from among 108 employees in the field of private sectors through a survey questionnaire. Findings shown that the higher the level of incivility in the workplace by team members, the greater their tendency to hide knowledge, and this relationship is moderated by neuroticism. Specifically, the relationship was found to be stronger for those employees who were more neurotic than less neurotic.

Therefore, based on the review of theoretical foundations and research literature, study backgrounds, and analysis of relationships between research variables described above, the assumed conceptual model of the research is presented in Figure 1.

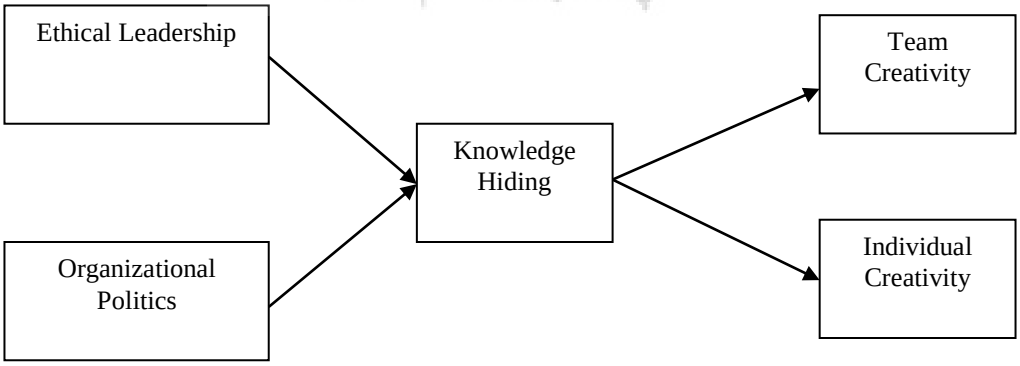

Figure 1: Research conceptual model

Research Method

Method and Sample

The current research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive in analytical-correlation type in terms of method. In applied research, the goal is to grow and develop applied knowledge in a specific field. Descriptive research involves collecting data for survey through hypothesis testing. Correlation research refers to research that aims to discover relationships between variables using correlation statistics. The statistical population of this research includes Euclid government organizations including 950 people. The sample size according to the use of the structural equation modeling method for data analysis, a rule of thumb of 30 samples will be used for each variable, and according to the examination of 5 variables in this research, 270 people will be selected as a statistical sample, which is available in a non-random way.

Measures:

Ethical leadership: In order to measure EL, we used a 10-item scale developed by Brown et al. (2005). Examples of these items include: "My supervisor makes fair and balanced decisions," "When making decisions, he/she asks, 'What is the right thing to do?'" and "Disciplines employees who violate ethical standards." The internal reliability (α = 0.89) for this scale was deemed acceptable. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated and confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the study of Saeed et al. (2022) 0.94.

Organizational Politics: Kacmar and Carlson (1997), 15-item scale with 5-likert scale was used to assess OP perceptions (with three components: general political behavior, go along to get ahead, and pay and promotion). Sample items are "It is best not to rock the boat in this organization" "Sometimes it is easier to remain quiet than to fight the system," and "People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down." Internal reliability (a = 0.82) for the OP measure was satisfactory. The reliability obtained in the study of Bashir et al. (2024) was 0.93.

Knowledge Hiding: KH behaviors was assessed using Serenko and Bontis (2016) 3-item Knowledg Hiding with 5-likert scale. One sample item is "my fellow colleagues often communicate only part of the whole story to me." The reliability and validity of this questionnaire has been confirmed. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated and confirmed using Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 in this study and in the study of Donate at al. (2022) has been 0.89.

Individual Creativity: We used the 20-item scale developed by Hamadneh (2016) with 5-likert scale. It includes the dimensions of fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration based of Zhou and George (2001). Sample items are "Suggests new ways to achieve goals or objectives." "Comes up with new and practical ideas to improve performance." The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated and confirmed (Cronbach's a = .87). Its reliability value through Cronbach's alpha in the study of Mosaddeq Rad and Saadati (2016) was 0.84.

Team Creativity: For team creativity, 17-items scale developed by Hanke's (2006) which includes three dimensions (analogical thinking, selective encoding and lateral thinking) was used. The reliability obtained in the study of Luo et al. (2024) was 0.80. Sample items are "How well the team moves from cognitive category to cognitive category and is able to get out of thinking ruts"; "We compared and contrasted some ideas but not others."; "We encouraged each other to talk about how we solved other problems." The Cronbach α for team creativity was (a = 0.85).

Results

Data analysis

In this research, for the purpose of descriptive analysis of information and data, information about demographic variables including gender, age, education and work experience is provided. In the following, the inferential analysis of the research data will be mentioned in order to check the hypotheses of the research, which is done through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and using Amos software.

Descriptive analysis

The results of the descriptive analysis of the respondents and the statistical sample of the study based on the demographic variables of gender, age, education, and work experience are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of respondents

Demographic variables	Descriptive statistics	Absolute frequency	Absolute frequency percentage	Cumulative frequency percentage
Gender	Male	212	78.5	**78.5**
	Female	58	21.5	**100.0**
Age	30 years old & under	66	24.4	**24.4**
	31-40 years	143	53.0	**77.4**
	41-50 years	51	18.9	**96.3**
	50 years old & higher	10	3.7	**100.0**
Education Background	High school degree	39	14.4	**14.4**
	Associate degree	70	25.9	**40.4**
	Bachelor's degree	107	39.6	**80.0**
	Master's degree & higher	54	20.0	**100.0**
Experience	Less than 5 years	4	1.5	**1.5**
	5-10 years	61	22.6	**24.1**
	11-15 years	153	56.7	**80.7**
	16-20 years	29	10.7	**91.5**
	Over 20 years	23	8.5	**100.0**
	Total	**270**	**100.0**	

As shown in Table 1, 78.5% of the respondents were male and 21.5% were female. Regarding age, most respondents (53%) were 31-40 years old. The distribution of respondents by education was appropriate, with the majority (39.6%) holding a bachelor's degree; concerning work experience, most respondents had 11-15 years of work experience.

Inferential analysis

Measurment Model

AMOS and SPSS software were used for inferential analysis of the collected data. The construct validity of the research items was also examined through confirmatory factor analysis, the results of which are presented in the tables below.

Table 2. standardized and unstandardized regression weights of EL

Relationships	Unstandard Estimate	Standard Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
leadership ← q51	1.000	0.716				confirmed
leadership ← q52	1.106	0.726	.123	8.971	0.000	confirmed
leadership ← q53	1.050	0.719	.116	9.018	0.000	confirmed
leadership ← q54	.950	0.705	.125	7.586	0.000	confirmed
leadership ← q55	.852	0.698	.109	7.809	0.000	confirmed
leadership ← q56	.631	0.580	.116	5.428	0.000	confirmed
leadership ← q57	.753	0.645	.122	6.167	0.000	confirmed
leadership ← q58	.694	0.607	.123	5.634	0.000	confirmed
leadership ← q59	.878	0.701	.120	7.308	0.000	confirmed
leadership ← q60	.723	0.609	.119	6.074	0.000	confirmed

According to the results presented in Table 2, standard factor loadings along with critical ratio (C.R.) and P value (significance level) show that all factor loadings have a significant difference from zero ($p<0.05$); Therefore, all relationships in the measurement mode of EL are confirmed with 95% confidence, and therefore all factors remain in the model.

Table 3. standardized and unstandardized regression weights of OP

Relationships	Unstandard Estimate	Standard Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result

politics ← q61	1.000					confirmed
politics ← q65	0.706	0.610	0.289	4.758	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q66	0.693	0.605	0.326	3.938	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q67	0.708	0.616	0.271	4.391	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q68	0.709	0.618	0.328	5.689	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q69	0.715	0.635	0.397	4.795	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q70	0.720	0.642	0.325	6.236	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q71	0.719	0.639	0.372	5.797	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q72	0.665	0.563	0.275	3.455	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q73	0.685	0.588	0.294	3.528	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q74	0.670	0.571	0.180	3.639	0.000	confirmed
politics ← q75	0.797	0.681	0.396	3.096	0.000	confirmed

According to the results presented in table 3, the non-standard factor loadings along with the critical ratio and the P value (significance level) show that except for questions 62, 63 and 64, all the factor loadings have a significant difference from zero ($p< 0.05$); Therefore, all relationships in the model except 3 items are confirmed with 95% confidence, and therefore 12 factors remain in the model for the OP construct.

Table 4. standardized and unstandardized regression weights of KH

Relationships	Unstandard Estimate	Standard Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
Knowledge Hiding ← q76	1.000	0.912				confirmed
Knowledge Hiding ← q77	1.380	0.923	0.151	9.146	0.000	confirmed
Knowledge Hiding ← q78	0.984	0.894	0.104	9.501	0.000	confirmed

According to the results presented in table 4, standard factor loadings along with C.R. and P (significance level) show that all factor loadings have a significant difference from zero ($p<0.05$); Therefore, all relationships in the model for the KH construct are confirmed with 95% confidence, and therefore all factors remain in the model.

Table 5. standardized and unstandardized regression weights of individual creativity

Relationships	Unstandard Estimate	Standard Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
fluency ← q79	1.000	0.731				confirmed
fluency ← q80	1.205	0.752	0.227	5.318	0.000	confirmed
fluency ← q81	1.498	0.795	0.260	5.751	0.000	confirmed
fluency ← q82	1.411	0.780	0.258	5.469	0.000	confirmed
fluency ← q83	1.011	0.734	0.256	3.952	0.000	confirmed
flexibility ← q84	1.000	0.687				confirmed
flexibility ← q85	1.205	0.703	0.227	5.318	0.000	confirmed
flexibility ← q86	1.498	0.763	0.260	5.751	0.000	confirmed
flexibility ← q87	1.411	0.741	0.258	5.469	0.000	confirmed
flexibility ← q88	1.011	0.685	0.256	3.952	0.000	confirmed
originality ← q89	1.000	0.617				confirmed
originality ← q90	1.315	0.684	0.236	5.574	0.000	confirmed
originality ← q91	0.875	0.587	0.181	5.835	0.000	confirmed
originality ← q92	1.164	0.665	0.217	5.368	0.000	confirmed
originality ← q93	0.750	0.568	0.174	4.311	0.000	confirmed
elaboration ← q94	1.000	0.714				confirmed

elaboration ← $q95$	0.879	0.678	0.256	3.436	0.000	confirmed
elaboration ← $q96$	1.632	0.794	0.356	4.586	0.000	confirmed
elaboration ← $q97$	1.512	0.758	0.338	4.477	0.000	confirmed
elaboration ← $q98$	1.497	0.747	0.334	4.476	0.000	confirmed

Based on the results of the factor analysis presented in Table 5, the factor loadings, C.R., and significance levels indicate that all factor loadings are significantly different from zero ($p<0.05$). Therefore, with 95% confidence, all relationships in the model are confirmed, and thus all factors related to the construct of employee's individual creativity, along with its four dimensions, remain in the model.

Table 6. standardized and unstandardized regression weights of team creativity

Relationships	Unstandard Estimate	Standard Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
Analogical thinking ← $q99$	1.000	0.847				confirmed
Analogical thinking ← $q100$	.942	0.812	0.146	6.434	0.000	confirmed
Analogical thinking ← $q101$	.805	0.743	0.139	5.784	0.000	confirmed
Analogical thinking ← $q102$	.986	0.836	0.146	6.742	0.000	confirmed
Analogical thinking ← $q103$	.904	0.786	0.137	6.611	0.000	confirmed
Selective encoding ← $q104$	1.000	0.763				confirmed
Selective encoding ← $q105$	0.688	0.653	0.125	5.485	0.000	confirmed
Selective encoding ← $q106$	0.796	0.682	0.131	6.084	0.000	confirmed
Selective encoding ← $q107$	0.970	0.758	0.147	6.587	0.000	confirmed
Selective encoding ← $q108$	0.894	0.732	0.146	6.103	0.000	confirmed
Selective encoding ← $q109$	0.656	0.601	0.156	4.217	0.000	confirmed
Selective encoding ← $q110$	0.593	0.516	0.139	4.272	0.000	confirmed
Lateral thinking ← $q111$	1.000	0.862				confirmed
Lateral thinking ← $q112$	0.831	0.786	0.179	4.631	0.000	confirmed
Lateral thinking ← $q113$	0.753	0.731	0.187	4.032	0.000	confirmed
Lateral thinking ← $q114$	0.901	0.824	0.188	4.785	0.000	confirmed
Lateral thinking ← $q115$	1.027	0.867	0.205	4.999	0.000	confirmed

According to the results presented in table 6, factor loadings along with C.R. and P value (significance level) show that all factor loadings have a significant difference from zero ($p<0.05$); Therefore, all relationships in the measurment model of team creativity (with four dimensions) are confirmed with 95% confidence, and therefore all factors remain in the model.

Table 7. Confirmatory factor analysis results for measurement model fitness

Variable		RMR	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	IFI	NFI	CFI
Amount of fitness		≤ 0.08	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9	≤ 0.1	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9
Ethical Leadership		0.061	0.982	0.936	0.000	0.994	0.930	0.978
Organizational politics		0.064	0.958	0.909	0.060	0.936	0.915	0.930
Knowledge Hiding		0.059	0.956	0.923	0.020	0.997	0.920	0.947
Individual Creativity	Fluency	0.064	0.944	0.901	0.061	0.929	0.904	0.967
	Flexibility	0.040	0.980	0.940	0.079	0.964	0.943	0.964
	Originality	0.060	0.964	0.902	0.062	0.919	0.914	0.962
	Elaboration	0.050	0.978	0.934	0.089	0.939	0.911	0.937
Team Creativity	Analogical Thinking	0.020	0.988	0.964	0.026	0.965	0.983	1.000
	Selective Encoding	0.050	0.942	0.912	0.031	0.952	0.901	0.951
	Lateral Thinking	0.050	0.959	0.914	0.022	0.948	0.913	0.946

The results of the measurement model assessment based on the model fit indices, as shown in Table 7, indicate that the measurement models for all constructs in the study exhibit adequate fit. For all constructs

in the model, the fit indices, including Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), and other indices, were all above the standard threshold of 0.9. Additionally, the Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) values for all constructs were less than 0.08, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values for all constructs were below 0.1. Therefore, overall, the measurement models of the study are deemed to be in good condition, and their fit has been confirmed.

Structural Model

At final step, the final model (structural model) was examined in order to test the hypotheses. In fact, at this step, the conceptual model of the research is evaluated. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the factor structure of the EL, KH, OP, and individual and team creativity constructs. Different confirmatory factor analyses were performed through AMOS 22. The resulting 5 factor model demonstrated good fit, $\chi 2/df = 2.42$, RMR = 0.05, GFI = 0.903, CFI = 0.928, and RMSEA = 0.09. See table 8.

Table 8. Structural model fit indices

	CMIN/DF	RMR	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	IFI	NFI	CFI
Structural model	2.42	0.05	0.903	0.915	0.09	0.906	0.943	0.928
Amount of fitness	≤ 5	≤ 0.08	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9	≤ 0.10	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9

After the confirmation and fitting of the conceptual model, the research hypotheses were examined in the form of path coefficients, with the results presented in Table 9.

Table 9. direct effect and testing hypothesis

			Non-Standardized Estimate	standardized Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
EL	--->	KH	-0.533	-0.411	0.144	4.022	0.011	Supported
OP	--->	KH	-0.646	-0.572	0.161	4.609	0.000	Supported
KH	--->	IC	-0.583	-0.463	0.343	3.554	0.001	Supported
KH	--->	TC	-0.619	-0.521	0.112	2.921	0.004	Supported

As shown in above table, the paths for all variables in the model are significant (P<0.05). EL (EL) has a significant negative effect on KH behaviors, with a path coefficient of -0.41, while OP have a significant negative effect with a path coefficient of -0.57. Additionally, KH has significant negative effects on both individual and team creativity of employees (IC & TC), with path coefficients of -0.46 and -0.52, respectively. Therefore, all hypotheses and relationships in the conceptual model of the research have been confirmed.

Discussion and Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between EL, OP, KH, and employee individual anf team creativity. We demonstrated that OP negatively predicts KH that, in turn, negatively predicts individual and team creativity of employees. The findings are partly consistent and partly contradictory to previous studies. Regarding the negative relationship between OP and KH, it is inconsistent, but regarding the negative relationship between KH and employee creativity (IC & TC), it is consistent. Cui et al. (2016) suggesting that in a politically charged work environment employees are likely to engage in KH as they fear that the knowledge that they may share with good intentions may cause unexpected problems. But on the other hand, knowledge sharing flourishes in an organization where information flows easily due to less demarcation between departments (Al-Alawi et al., 2007). As a result, when favorable OP are in place and information flows properly, individuals' tendency toward KH behaviors decreases. Then, by reducing KH behaviors and developing knowledge sharing behaviors, the individual and team creativity of employees in the organization increases. When employees in an organization feel that the capabilities and knowledge of individuals are the criteria for competence and promotions and OP supported them, they are led towards OP and decreased deceptive behaviors such as

KH. This finding is consistent with the results of Taghizadeh and Rajabi Farjad (2021) and Malik et al. (2019).

The results of the research indicated that EL has a negative and inverse relationship with KH behaviors, which is consistent with previous studies such as Imani et al (2022), Zandkarimi (2019) and Tang et al (2015). These studies also concluded that EL style negatively affects KH and positively influences knowledge sharing. The findings of this research further demonstrated that when leaders and managers in public organizations adopt an EL style and exhibit behaviors such as listening to employees' opinions, ensuring fairness in actions and rewards, discussing ethical behaviors, encouraging ethical conduct, and so on, while considering ethics, competence, and capability as criteria for promotion, evaluation, and decision-making, they create an environment conducive to cooperative behaviors among employees. This approach reduces employees' tendency to hide their knowledge, expertise, and skills, thereby fostering creativity and innovation at both individual and team levels. The results of this study confirm these relationships in line with prior researchs.

The results of this study also indicated that KH behaviors have a negative impact on employee creativity at both individual and team levels, with the negative effect on team creativity being slightly greater than that on individual creativity. The inverse effect of KH on creativity aligns with the findings of studies by Malik et al. (2019), Dargahi et al. (2018), and Bogilović et al. (2017). Malek (2019) argued that when an individual decides to hide his or her knowledge from diverse colleagues it will not only impede the individual's creativity but also the team's.

Our research sheds light on how organizations can mitigate KH behaviors among employees by fostering an environment of EL and desirable OP. Our findings indicate that ethical leaders play a crucial role in promoting knowledge sharing within their teams. Employees who wish to enhance their knowledge sharing practices may benefit from developing resilience and engaging in professional development initiatives that emphasize ethical behavior. Additionally, organizations should cultivate EL by providing training programs for leaders that highlight the importance of psychological principles and showcase examples of ethical conduct that leaders should embody in their daily actions and management strategies. Furthermore, it is essential for employees to recognize the importance of both internal and external regulations (OP) in facilitating knowledge sharing. Therefore, organizations must consistently implement mental health initiatives and politics to ensure a seamless flow of information among employees and reduce tendencies toward KH.

Also, considering the significant effect of KH on individual and team creativity of employees, it is therefore recommended that managers of public organizations act in a way that employees trust them and eliminate the atmosphere of suspicion in the organization. Managers should also socialize newly hired employees with the organization and its members so that the employees' attitude towards the organization's policies, laws and regulations improves from the moment they arrive and provides the basis for creative work behaviors.

Our study makes two theoretical contributions. First, our study enhances the understanding of the role of negative aspects of EL and OP on KH and the negative effect of KH in the development of creativity. Prior work concerning the relationship between these variables and creativity has exclusively concentrated on identifying positive behaviors such as knowledge sharing and knowledge management, which may facilitate creativity.

Second contribution is related to the examination of the relationship between individual KH and team creativity. Bogilović et al. (2014) have analyzed this relationship at the dyadic level by looking at how KH correlates with an individual's creativity through a reciprocal distrust loop. Thus, our research moves away from the traditional academic emphasis on examining creativity solely at a single level (Gong et al., 2009). Consequently, we contribute to existing literature by demonstrating that similar social exchange patterns that influence the connection between KH and creativity at the dyadic level can also be anticipated within teams or groups.

A potential limitation of our study is the generalizability of its findings. The research sample was employees of selected pubic organizations in Eqlid County, which was an almost homogeneous sample, consisting solely of employees participants. Although the behaviors examined in this study -El, OP, KH and creativity (both individual and team)- are not limited to any specific occupational group and may be

applicable to all working groups, including employee of public section; however, the generalizability of the results to other organizations and work groups in other professions may require further consideration. Future studies need to conduct further investigations into the relationships between research variables and explore these relationships at different levels and among employees of other organizations and companies to enable better generalization. Furthermore, Connelly et al. (2012) identify three interrelated factors of KH: "evasive hiding, rationalized hiding, and playing dumb" (Bashir et al., 2024; Fong et al., 2019). While our study primarily concentrated on general KH without differentiating between playing dumb, evasive hiding, and rationalized hiding, it is important to note that these three dimensions may lead to distinct consequences and operate through different underlying mechanisms.

When individuals hide knowledge, possibly due to a supportive or competitive work environment, they require a high degree of cultural intelligence to navigate social exchange dynamics in a diverse context (Bogilović et al., 2017), which facilitates their creativity. Conversely, when individuals are less inclined to hide knowledge, they do not necessarily need to possess a high level of cultural intelligence to be creative, as they are more likely to engage in the social exchange process naturally. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies examine the moderating effect of organizational climate or supportive environment, as well as the role of cultural intelligence in the impact of KH on employee creativity.
Considering that in the process of data collection and also in reviewing the theoretical foundations, we realized that KH behaviors can be dependent on individual factors such as personality, attitude, stress, and group factors such as group communications, group conflict, etc., this study examines employees' perceptions of two key organizational factors, namely EL and OP. Hence, another suggestion for future researchers is to investigate the impact of factors at both individual and group levels on KH as well.

To improve the research model, it is suggested that further studies be conducted to identify how EL influences KH through qualitative and exploratory work, so that the inherent limitations of quantitative studies have less impact on the research model. Additionally, while this study has examined the effect of EL style on KH, it is recommended that the impact of other leadership styles, including directive and participative leadership styles, be investigated and the results compared with those obtained in this research.

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